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ABSTRACT

This study sought to determine the experience, concerns, and insights of 302 current and former State Teachers of the Year as they relate to educational and professional reform. A secondary objective was to determine whether these teachers, categorized on the basis of background variables, differ in their perceptions of educational and professional reform. Respondents were asked to rate their level of support for 21 reform proposals on a scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Frequency statistics revealed various levels of support for specific reform proposals. Areas receiving strongest support included higher teacher salaries, mentor teachers to assist and supervise beginning teachers, and more state funding for educational programs. Undesirable reforms included longer school days, and use of standardized tests for evaluating both students and prospective teachers. Some significant differences of opinion were found between secondary and elementary teachers, older and younger teachers, and teachers with different educational backgrounds. (JD)

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PROPOSED REFORMS IN EDUCATION:

VIEWS OF

STATE TEACHERS OF THE YEAR

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Objectives

The primary objective of this study was to determine the experience, concerns, and insights of State Teachers of the Year as they relate to educational and professional reform. A secondary objective was to determine whether State Teachers of the Year categorized on the basis of background variables differ in their perceptions of educational and professional reform.

Perspective

This year marks the five-year anniversary of the beginning of the education reform movement in the United States. In the Spring of 1983, A National at Risk was released by the National Commission on Excellence in Education. This report was soon followed by well over a dozen others. These proposals ranged from recommendations that would provide for the education of four year olds in the public schools to those that would abolish undergraduate teacher education programs and mandate five year preparation programs for teachers. A Gallup Poll conducted during the Spring of 1988 revealed that education remains the top priority for the American public. This concern was rated higher in importance than any other foreign or domestic issue including drugs.

A primary theme in the educational reform literature is the need to strengthen the teaching profession. Two reports addressing professionalism are those released by the Holmes Group (1986) and the Carnegie Forum (1986). Other reports, including those provided by Gallup Polls, identify specific concerns related to the teaching profession. Although these groups have formally proposed reforms, they are not, of course, the only groups desiring changes. State legislatures throughout the country have commissioned groups to study reform and have mandated significant and sometimes massive changes in their educational structures. The changes are often determined by "authorities" whose specific expertise may not exceed the vantage point offered by their former position of student in the educational process. A timely example is Georgia's Quality Basic Education Act. This legislative mandate was drafted in 1984 by the Education Review Commission and called for a four-year phase-in period ending in 1988. Implementation is still several years and as much as $120 million away. The Review Commission which was responsible for the final document draft was composed of 15 persons. A north Georgia school superintendent served as Commission Chair and a retired Bibb County teacher was the only other educator to serve. Individuals involved in the schooling process (teachers, administrators, teacher educators,

parents, and pupils) have worked diligently to keep up with mandated changes in Georgia and throughout the nation. Praise and criticism about reforms and the current status of the teaching profession are rampant.

Possibly the most significant change agent in educational reform will be the classroom teacher. In the past, the classroom teacher's role as change agent has often been confined to the implementation of recommendations of others. The effectiveness of the recommendations, however, depends on the support of these change agents.

This study will provide data that will be valuable in analyzing the level of support by the nation's most capable teachers. Information identifying the perceptions of these teachers which have been recognized for their effectiveness and professional leadership, should serve as a valuable source for individuals in decision making positions.

Methods

An instrument was designed by the researchers to ascertain background information and perceptions of State Teachers of the Year relative to reform recommendations. Several sources significantly influenced item selection including Gallup Research Corporation, Carnegie Forum, National Commission on Excellence in Teacher Education and the Holmes Group. The long standing experience in educational evaluation represented by these sources positively contributes to the instrument's content validity.

Background data requested on the instrument included: (1) population of community, (2) student enrollment of school, (3) organizational structure of school, (4) grade levels taught, (5) subjects taught, (6) degrees attained, (7) undergraduate major, (8) undergraduate GPA, (9) age at which initial interest in teaching was developed, (10) age, (11) sex, and (12) race. Respondents were asked to rate their level of support for 21 reform proposals on a scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. These proposals are listed below.

1. abolition of undergraduate major in education
2. career ladders with differentiated salaries in relationship to accomplishments
3. certification based on classroom performance
4. differentiated staffing; certified teachers assisted by interns, instructors, paraprofessionals, etc.
5. higher teacher salaries
6. increased academic curriculum in high schools

7. less emphasis on athletics and other extracurricular activities
8. longer school days
9. longer school year
10. mentor teachers to assist and supervise beginning teachers
11. more federal funding for educational programs
12. more state funding for educational programs
13. national board certification process
14. partnerships between college/universities and community schools
15. public education for four year olds
16. requirement for students to do homework
17. requirement of five years for collegiate teacher training
18. restriction of teachers to instructing only in their subject matter major
19. standardized testing as a basis for teacher credentializing and licensing
20. standardized testing of students at every grade level
21. use of standardized test scores in determining student promotion

The instrument was mailed to 685 State Teachers of the Year during May, 1988. There were 302 usable instruments (45%) returned by the deadline. Data were analyzed by using frequency statistics to determine percentages for each item and analysis of variance to determine significant differences at the .05 level between groups of respondents categorized on the basis of background variables.

Data Source

Subjects of the study were current and former State Teachers of the Year. In each of the fourteen most recent academic years, the Council of Chief State School Officers (state school superintendents) has sponsored a carefully defined process for determining the Teacher of the Year in each state. In general, the selection criteria include evaluation of a candidate's ability to define in writing the individual's philosophy of education and knowledge of educational issues; assessment by observation of the individual teacher with particular attention to innovative techniques; professional involvement; and participation by the individual in civic/community endeavors. The mailing list for these individuals was provided by the National State Teachers of the Year Association.

Results

Frequency statistics revealed various levels of support for specific reform proposals. Areas receiving strongest support included:

1. Higher teacher salaries,
2. Mentor teachers to assist and supervise beginning teachers,
3. More state funding for educational programs,
4. Partnerships between colleges/universities and community schools,
5. Differentiated staffing: certified teachers assisted by interns, instructors, paraprofessionals, etc.

Reforms viewed as undesirable included:

1. Longer school days,
2. Use of standardized test scores in determining student promotion,
3. Standardized testing as a basis for teacher credentializing and licensing,
4. Abolition of undergraduate major in education,
5. Standardized testing of students at every grade level.

Analyses of variance revealed that there were 42 significant differences between subjects grouped on the basis of background variables. A few of these findings are listed below:

1. High school teachers view the establishment of career ladders more positively than elementary teachers.
2. Individuals possessing a doctorate or a specialist (sixth year) degree view public education for four year olds more positively than teachers with fewer degrees.
3. Teachers from large schools view a requirement of five years for collegiate teacher training in a more positive manner than teachers from very small schools.
4. Individuals who developed an interest in teaching after the age of 25 view abolition of the undergraduate teacher education major in a more positive manner than those who developed an interest during high school.
5. Older teachers view longer school days and longer school years more positively than younger teachers.
6. Younger teachers view increased federal funding more positively than older teachers.

Educational Importance

Although many of the reforms proposed and/or implemented in the last five years are viewed as positive methods for improving education, State Teachers of the Year perceive some as negatively impacting our educational system. These acclaimed practitioners of excellence are in optimum positions for evaluating effectiveness. Therefore, their expressions of disagreement should serve as caution flags for individuals in decision-making positions. Additionally, further research should be conducted to determine reasons for differing views of respondents categorized on the basis of background variables.

Table 1

Background Information for State Teachers of the Year

	Variable	Percentages
1.	Population of community in which school is located:	
	a. less than 10,000	20.5
	b. 10,000 to 20,000	18.6
	c. 20,001 to 50,000	26.6
	d. 50,001 to 100,000	15.5
	e. more than 100,000	18.8
2.	Student enrollment of school:	
	a. less than 300	10.4
	b. 300 to 750	43
	c. 751 to 1200	21.5
	d. 1201 to 1650	14.4
	e. more than 1650	10.7
3.	Organizational structure of school:	
	a. elementary grades	30.6
	b. middle grades/junior high	8.7
	c. high school	43.6
	d. combination	17.1
4.	Grade level(s) taught:	
	a. elementary	33.5
	b. middle grades/junior high	12.3
	c. high school	46.4
	d. combination	7.8

5.	Number of subjects taught:		
	a.	one	17.9
	b.	two	18.2
	c.	three	18.9
	d.	four	9.3
	e.	more than four	35.7
6.	Highest degree attained:		
	a.	baccalaureate	16.8
	b.	master's	62.3
	c.	specialist	13.5
	d.	doctorate	7.4
7.	Undergraduate major:		
	a.	art	2.0
	b.	business	2.0
	c.	early childhood	3.0
	d.	elementary	18.5
	e.	English	14.7
	f.	foreign language	3.0
	g.	health and physical education	2.0
	h.	home economics	3.7
	i.	industrial arts	.3
	j.	language arts	3.0
	k.	math	6.0
	l.	music	4.7
	m.	science	14.7
	n.	social science	14.7
	o.	special education	2.0
	p.	education (general)	4.0
	q.	other	1.7

8.	Undergraduate grade point average:		
	a.	2.0 to 2.49	2.0
	b.	2.5 to 2.99	13.4
	c.	3.0 to 3.49	36.8
	d.	3.5 to 3.99	45.1
	e.	4.0	2.7
9.	Most influential person in decision to teach:		
	a.	family member	32.3
	b.	elementary teacher	12.5
	c.	elementary principal	1.4
	d.	high school teacher	22.7
	e.	high school principal	1.4
	f.	school counselor	.7
	g.	friend	7.5
	h.	other	21.5
10.	Family members serving in field of education:		
	a.	brother	12.6
	b.	daughter	15.2
	c.	father	5.6
	d.	mother	18.5
	e.	sister	23.8
	f.	son	7.9
	g.	spouse	36.4
11.	Age at which individual initially developed an interest in teaching:		
	a.	younger than 12	27.7
	b.	12-15	16.7
	c.	15-18	19.7
	d.	19-21	18.3
	e.	22-25	8.3
	f.	older than 25	9.3

12.	Current age:		
	a.	21-30	1.0
	b.	31-40	16.2
	c.	41-50	31.7
	d.	51-60	27.2
	e.	61-70	16.9
	f.	older than 70	7.0
13.	Sex:		
	a.	female	61.9
	b.	male	38.1
14.	Race:		
	a.	black	4.0
	b.	hispanic	.7
	c.	other	1.7
	d.	white	93.6

Table 2

Perceptions of Educational Reform Considerations

Reforms	Percentages			
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. abolition of undergraduate major in education	13.1	22.4	41.4	23.1
2. career ladders with differentiated salaries in relationship to accomplishments	25.6	48.5	17.7	8.2
3. certification based on classroom performance	23.4	47.7	24.1	4.8
4. differentiated staffing; certified teachers assisted by interns, instructors, paraprofessionals, etc.	37.5	50.6	10.5	1.4
5. higher teacher salaries	75.6	22.1	2.3	0
6. increased academic curriculum in high schools	41.0	40.2	16.4	2.4
7. less emphasis on athletics and other extracurricular activities	30.2	31.1	30.2	8.5
8. longer school days	8.0	17.1	52.2	22.7
9. longer school year	12.5	27.0	36.5	24.0
10. mentor teachers to assist and supervise beginning teachers	63.5	33.8	2.4	.3
11. more federal funding for educational programs	49.2	35.1	12.7	3.0
12. more state funding for educational programs	59.3	36.1	3.3	1.3
13. national board certification process	16.9	36.9	34.5	11.7

14. partnerships between college/ universities and community schools	51.6	42.7	4.7	1.0
15. public education for four year olds	11.8	23.6	41.3	23.3
16. requirement for students to do homework	30.7	45.1	20.8	3.4
17. requirement of five years for collegiate teacher training	23.6	37.0	33.3	6.1
18. restriction of teachers to instructing only in their subject matter major	28.4	41.5	26.8	3.3
19. standardized testing of teachers as a basis for teacher credentializing and licensing	5.7	27.4	42.6	24.3
20. standardized testing of students at every grade level	5.4	33.9	41.2	19.5
21. use of standardized test scores in determining student promotion	3.0	23.6	45.5	27.9

Table 3

Significant Differences at the .05 Level Between Groups Categorized on the Bases of Background Variables

Variables Significant items	F. Prob.	Direction of Significance
Population of community		
longer school days	.0061	more than 100,000 > less than 10,000
longer school year	.0360	more than 100,000 > less than 10,000
national board certification	.0202	more than 100,000 > others
five years teacher training	.0029	10,000 - 20,000 > less than 10,000
Student enrollment		
abolition of undergraduate education majors	.0330	1201-1650 > less than 751
public ed. for 4 yr. olds	.0104	751-1200 > 1201 - 1650
five years teacher training	.0186	751-1200 > less than 300
Organizational structure		
abolition of undergraduate education major	.0003	h.s. > elem. & middle
increased academic curriculum in high school	.0039	h.s., elem. > middle
restriction to instructing only in subject major	.0243	h.s. > elem.
Highest degree attained		
public ed. for 4 yr. olds	.0000	doc., spec. > bacc.
restriction to instructing only in subject major	.0229	doc. > bacc.
Age initially interested		
abolition of undergraduate education major	.0203	older than 25 > 16-18

certification based on classroom performance	.0292	19-25 > younger than 12
use of stand. tests for student promotion	.0292	19-21 > younger than 12
Current age		
higher teacher salaries	.0292	19-21 > younger than 12
longer school days	.0028	older than 70 > 21-40
longer school year	.0000	older than 70 > 21-40
more federal funding	.0019	21-40 > older than 60
public ed. for 4 yr. olds	.0083	21-40 > 61-70
standardized testing at every grade	.0346	older than 70 > 31-50
Sex		
mentor teachers	.0256	females > males
partnerships between colleges and community schools	.0075	females > males